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Bravo, heresy

By coincidence (or was it coincidence?) the remarkable success of the nuclear freeze initiative in gaining congressional support was immediately followed by the collective conversion of four former government officials to the policy of no-first-use of nuclear weapons in the name of human survival.

Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, George Kennan and Gerard Smith, all one-time architects of American policy, must have seemed to the Reagan administration like a heretical Gang of Four, even though their concerted warning against the first-use policy was entirely justified.

Their public warning was a challenge that could not go unanswered, but Secretary Haig's answer forced him to acknowledge and defend two things the Reagan administration had never before admitted publicly: (1) Its policy actually is first-use, which of course completely eliminates mutual deterrence in favor of unilateral blackmail and nuclear aggression in case the blackmail doesn't work; (2) the executive branch had indeed received, from the other side, repeated proposals for a mutual treaty of no-first-use, but had rejected them all behind closed doors, without any discussion in the Congress or any explanation to the people.

Rejection of no-first-use is worse than rejection of the freeze because acceptance of first-use makes any freeze operatively meaningless. So long as overkill stockpiles of omnicidal weapons exist, the indispensable precondition of human survival is no-first-use, that is, mutual deterrence, which however was explicitly ruled out by Haig.

In his answering speech from Georgetown he laid it on the line: "Let us remember, first and foremost, that we are trying to deter the Soviet Union, not ourselves."

This politically insane commitment to first-use is precisely what triggered the courageous decision of the four distinguished dissidents to go public.

No-first-use not only is the clear will of the great majority of people; public opinion sampling invariably shows that the great majority has the mistaken impression that such is already our government's policy.

When told it is not, many refuse to believe, and all express horror. Thus, public support for no-first-use is not only as obtainable as it was for the freeze, but it is more necessary than ever, now that Haig has been made to show his hand.

Everyone who knows the facts should inform his neighbor and put pressure on Congress. In the national campaign of Mobilization for Survival and in the international preparations for the U.N. Special Session on Disarmament, demands for a no-first-use treaty should be central.

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